Field Reports

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FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS INTO UNKNOWN PERUVIAN MAMMALS

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INTRODUCTION

For many years, I have been collecting reports of several large, zoologically unknown mammals from the native peoples of the Peruvian Amazon. My living in Peru, traveling widely throughout the country, and visiting remote areas in connection with both my zoological and missionary work, has greatly facilitated my learning about such cryptic animals from native hunters.

In a previous article (Peter J. Hocking, 1992, Large Peruvian Mammals Unknown to Zoology, *Cryptozoology,* Vol. 11: 38–50), I discussed several of these cryptids, three being large felids which I have tentatively named the giant black panther, the speckled tiger, and the striped tiger. Another large mammal I discussed was an unknown arboreal primate known as the Isnachi. During 1985–1986, I undertook collecting expeditions in the Contamana Mountains (Loreto province—or "department," as provinces are known in Peru) hoping to find this mysterious ape-like monkey, only to find that it was not known there, but was known in other isolated tropical mountain ranges. Thus, in 1988, I led an expedition into the Orellana Mountains, another remote range in the same general region, but at a higher elevation.

I had already received several reports of the Isnachi being killed in the Orellana Mountains. However, the expedition was not able to reach the higher elevations, and it became clear that the location was simply too far

from regular travel routes—such as rivers, roads, and trails—to be accessible in the time I had available. Thus, I decided to conduct future efforts in the more accessible areas where the primate reportedly occurs; that is, in the Yanachaga Mountains of the Yanachaga National Park (Pasco province). Upon investigating as to what work had be carried out previously in that National Park, which was relatively new, I was surprised to find that its wildlife had never been seriously studied.

I was also interested in the Yanachaga Mountains because the three large felid cryptids I discussed earlier (Hocking, 1992, above) are reported in the same region. Thus, in 1991, I turned my attention to this particular tropical range in my continuing search for evidence of the Isnachi.

The Yanachaga National Park was officially established in 1986. It is not a large reserve. It is located in central Peru in Cerro de Pasco province (Fig. 1). Most of the Park encompasses montane forest, but some lowland forest also occurs, and even *paramo* (*puna*) at an altitude of about 13,000 feet (4,000 m). The Park can be entered from the Oxapampa-Huancabamba valley to the west, near the highest peaks of the range, which reach an altitude of 13,000 feet (4,000 m), or from the Palcazu valley to the east, which represents the lowest part of the range at only 1,000 feet (300 m) altitude (see Fig. 1).

Both valleys have dirt roads linking them to the coast; these are used daily by buses, large trucks, and pick-up trucks. The road to Oxapampa is the best. Austrian settlers and Quechua peoples populate the Oxapampa valley, while the Palcazu valley is populated primarily by Yanesha natives. The Yanesha are peaceful and bilingual.

In 1992 and 1993 I led two expeditions into the region. This report covers the results of both expeditions.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

First Expedition: July, 1992. On this expedition, our primary cryptozoological objectives were to gather information as to the best place in the Park to search for the Isnachi, and to locate good native hunters who could help me collect a specimen.

The team consisted of three naturalists from the Natural History Museum of the National Higher University of San Marcos, in Lima, Daniel Hocking—my 19-year-old son—and myself. (My son, who is a budding naturalist, helped me with skinning bird specimens.) We traveled overland from Lima, the capital, to the jungle town of Villa Rica, a 12-hour trip. From there, we traveled for five hours by pick-up truck to the Yanesha village of Shiringamazu. There we hired five native helpers to serve as porters and hunters, and also a cook. We carried out this expedition from the Palcazu valley, rather than entering the Park directly through the usual route of the Paujil

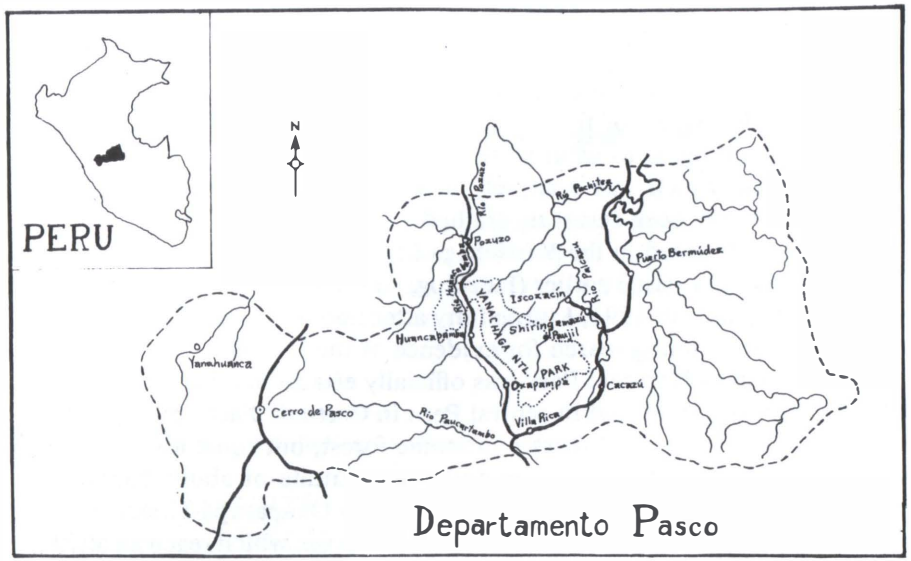

FIG. 1.—Generalized map of Pasco province ("department") showing location of the Yanachaga National Park (dotted line), where the author conducted the two expeditions described in this report.

Biological Station on the upper River Iscozacin. We headed for the Park limits from Shiringamazu (see Fig. 1), and then started on foot for the top of the high ridge of Cerro Chontilla.

This proved to be the most difficult part of the expedition, as we had to climb uphill for six hours, carrying heavy loads from 1,000 feet (300 m) to almost 3,200 feet (1,000 m). Those of us from Lima had serious doubts about making it, but in the end we reached the summit of Cerro Chontilla (Fig. 2). It was well worth the effort, for we found great biodiversity in the area, and collected several valuable bird and small mammal specimens.

After a week of collecting specimens, we descended down the western side of the ridge to a stream called Mucniz. Camping for a week at the farm of one Jose Roca, we collected more birds and mammals. In the final stage of the expedition, we climbed the next ridge, Cerro Jonatan, making camp at the summit, at an altitude of 2,100 feet (650 m). This placed us at the edge of the Park. After collecting for another week, we returned to Lima, unable to penetrate into the Park itself for lack of time. Nevertheless, we had been able to acquire valuable zoological specimens, and gather further information on crypto-mammals.

Second Expedition: September–October, 1993. The main objective of this expedition was to look for the Isnachi and the unknown felids. On this occasion, the work was carried out by two separate groups. My son, two

FIG. 2.—The tropical cloud forest of the Yanachaga Mountains, as seen from Cerro Chontilla.

native Yanesha helpers, and myself formed the first group. We collected specimens for two weeks in late September. The second group consisted of four naturalists from the Museum, but without native helpers (only the help of the Park rangers). They collected specimens during two weeks in October. As before, we approached the Park from the Palcazu valley in the east, but this time taking the route of the Iscozacin River and the Paujil Biological Station.

Both teams followed the same plan. As before, the first stage of our journey was from Lima to Villa Rica by bus. On the next stage, through the Palcazu valley by pick-up truck, we met up with our two native hunter-helpers. After a six-hour trip, we reached the end of the road at the town of Iscozacin. There, we boarded a large motorized Park canoe, and were taken by Park rangers up the Iscozacin River. We encountered rapids and other difficulties, but after three hours we finally reached Paujil, at the edge of the Park (see Fig. 1).

We collected specimens near the Biological Station, and also further into the Park, where animals were abundant and unafraid of humans. However, we found no sign of the Isnachi. We were now in "tiger" country, and although the Park rangers were threatened one entire night by a black jaguar, *Panthera onca,* my team was unable to observe or attract a single felid, even though bait was set for them at three different places. Nevertheless, both

teams collected several valuable bird and bat specimens, and I obtained more information on cryptic mammals and a bird which seems zoologically unknown.

Results

The results of this fieldwork will be summarized in separate parts, as follows:

The Isnachi. Although we did not encounter this mystery primate (see Hocking, 1992, above), a native hunter confirmed to me that it exists in the Yanachaga Mountains. He is an old Yanesha hunter living in Shiringamazu. I could tell that the other men in the village respected him greatly for his expertise as a hunter, and for his knowledge of the region's wildlife. He agreed to lead me to the place near the Pescado River where he said the Isnachi can be found, but he was unable to do so at the time of either expedition because of family responsibilities.

The Speckled Tiger. In 1992, I received a report of a speckled tiger (see Hocking, 1992, above) being killed that year in the Villa Rica region. When my team stayed in Villa Rica on our way back to Lima, I talked with the man reported to have killed the cat, a schoolteacher named Isaac Carhuamaca Hinojosa. He stated that, earlier that year, he and a native Ashanica had been hunting on a large, forested, pyramid-shaped mountain—which is in sight of Villa Rica—near the headwaters of the Bocaz River, when they surprised a large speckled tiger that threatened them. The native killed it with his shotgun.

Carhuamaca described the cat as light gray with solid-black speckles, similar to the previous description I had received of this peculiar felid (see Hocking, 1992, above). After the cat was skinned, he took the skin with him, but left the body with the native for food. After drying the skin, he took it to the town of Huancayo for safe-keeping. It was being kept there by relatives. I offered him a good price for the skin and skull, and provided him with all the necessary information for sending them to me in Lima. Although he promised to send me the skin with his wife, nothing came of it.

Later that year, I learned through friends that, when his wife went to pick up the skin in Huancayo, she found that the relatives had sold it, and that no one knew where it was. Naturally, this turned out to be a frustrating experience for me—coming so close to acquiring the skin of what appeared to be an unknown species of large felid, and then not being able to do so.

In 1993, when I passed through Villa Rica again on the second expedition, I begged the schoolteacher to do everything possible to obtain the skull for me, informing him that I would pay him well. Unfortunately nothing came of that either.

The Striped Tiger. During the first (1992) expedition, I was informed that

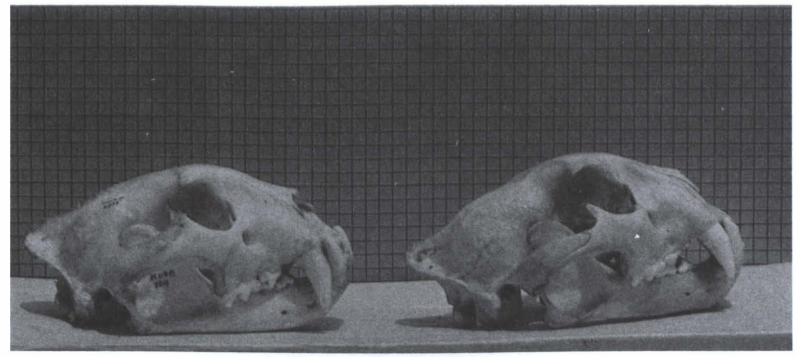

Fig. 3.—The skull of a striped tiger (right), compared to that of a jaguar, *Panthera onca.* This skull may represent the first solid evidence that a large, zoologically unknown felid species occurs in the Peruvian Amazon.

a striped tiger (see Hocking, 1992, above) had reportedly been killed by a rancher near Puerto Bermudez, to the east of our location. Apparently the cat had been killing his cattle. However, nobody knew what had happened to the skin.

Several months later, I did acquire the skull of what was reported to be a striped tiger. I was in my home in Lima when I received a telephone call from a friend who had come to the city on business. He said that he had an unusual "tiger" skull for me. He lives in Oxapampa, near the highest Yanachaga peak. Years earlier, I had asked him to be on the lookout for unknown felids in his region.

I went to his hotel, and he handed me a skull he had obtained from a hunter in the Pozuzo region (Pasco province). The hunter had told him that it had come from a striped tiger which he had killed. Although the hunter had not had an accompanying skin to prove his claim—he had already sold it—my friend had bought the skull anyway. I noticed that it had been carefully cleaned, as if it were something special.

Upon comparing the skull to jaguar skulls at the Museum, I found some interesting differences. Since then, I have sent photographs of the skull to felid specialist Steven C. Conkling, a paleontologist affiliated with the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, in the U.S. He has confirmed to me that a number of anatomical features seem to distinguish the skull from jaguar skulls, and that the evidence warrants further careful study to determine if a new species is involved. Official paperwork is currently being prepared to send the skull to Dr. Conkling on a museum-to-museum loan. This skull (Fig. 3) may well represent the first solid evidence that a large, zoologically unknown felid species occurs in the Peruvian Amazon.

Jungle Lion. I received several reports of what I have tentatively called a

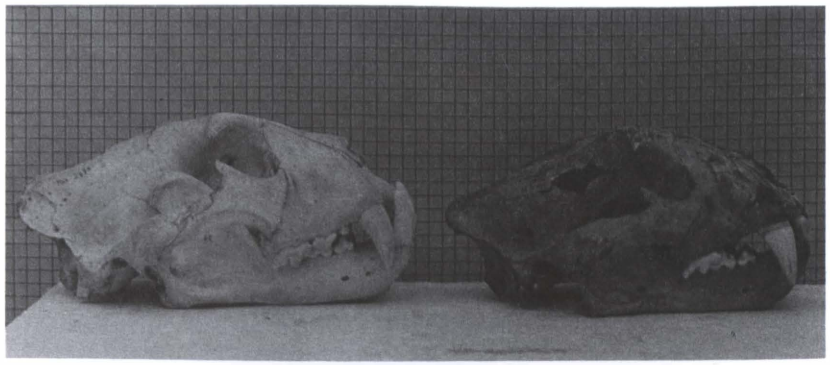

FIG. 4.—The skull of an anomalous jaguar reported to have leopard-like spots (right), compared to that of an ordinary jaguar, *Panthera onca.*

"jungle lion." I had heard stories of this supposed felid previously, but had not given them much credence. This cryptid is reported to be large, the size of an African lion, with long hair around its neck, but shorter than that of the African lion. Its color is said to be entirely reddish-brown. Rangers have reported seeing this felid in the Park, and one of my native helpers claimed to have once examined a dead specimen killed outside the Park, near Shiringamazu. I shall provide further information on this reported felid in a future paper.

Anomalous Jaguar. In 1993, I obtained the skull of another strange felid. It had been shot that same year by one of the native hunters who had worked for me during that year's expedition. He had killed the animal outside of the Park. Since it had been badly shot up, and— because of the heavy spotting— seemed to be a kind of jaguar, *Panthera onca,* his hunting companion sold the skin to a traveling merchant. Thus, I was only able to acquire the skull, which shows some differences from ordinary jaguar skulls (Fig. 4). This evidence is also being evaluated by Steven C. Conkling.

The hunter, who also skinned the animal, described it to me carefully. The felid was the size of a jaguar, but it was covered with solid-black irregular spots, rather than the normal jaguar-like rosettes and spots. Its background color was cinnamon-brown and white, rather than the jaguar-like yellow and white. In some ways, the cat's skin may have looked like that of the Afro-Asian leopard, which, of course, does not occur in South America. This report was a complete surprise to me, as well as to the native hunter. Yanesha hunters of the region know the wildlife very well, but none had previously reported such a cat. I hope to provide more information on this leopard-like, anomalous jaguar in a future article.

Pygmy Brown Bear. I also received several curious reports of a pygmy brown bear, an animal I had never even heard of before. It supposedly lives

in the Park, as does the well-known spectacled bear, *Tremarctus ornatus.* Park rangers claim to have seen the bear several times, including a young one being raised by a local person. The spectacled bear is the only known living ursid in South America, so these reports are particularly interesting. I will also provide further information on this cryptid in a future article.

Black Guan. Through the Park rangers, I also learned of a form of bird quite new to me, and, I believe, unknown to ornithology. It is a guan that is entirely black, without a fleshy wattle, such as is found on the black guan *Aburri aburria.* The known black guan also lives in the Park, but at lower elevations. This possible new species will be included in a future paper I am preparing on unknown birds in Peru.

In summary, according to the information I have been collecting over the years, there may be several zoologically unknown species of large felids living within or near the Yanachaga National Park, as well as the mysterious Isnachi monkey, and perhaps a new species of bear.

FUTURE PLANS

I plan to continue carrying out expeditions in the Yanachaga National Park searching for evidence of the Isnachi and the unknown felids. These expeditions will be annual or bi-annual. I will continue to report my findings in future issues of this journal.

Eventually, I hope to collect enough evidence to prove the existence of at least some of these cryptids, which would lead to new species descriptions. The cooperation of other zoologists in this quest would be welcomed. If the cryptozoological evidence I have collected turns out to be accurate, and we are successful in our efforts, the Yanachaga National Park could become famous as the abode of the greatest number of large new mammal species anywhere in the world.